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ABSTRACT

As university institutions have grown, the university and community relationship has again become obscure and troubling. Today, no one has to defend the thesis that adults can learn. We have turned our attention to how, when, and at what price. Over the last twenty years, postsecondary education has witnessed a shift from elite to mass education. Adult public education, mostly of a remedial nature, was largely a failure prior to the mid-fifties. But by that time in Canada and the U.S., the private sector (industry, armed services, etc.) had created teaching and learning systems that sometimes dwarfed the public sector in scope, results, and costs. During this same period, the mistaken view of education as an investment was accepted and transmitted to developing countries. What has been thrown into perspective now is the distinction between learning and education and how the two are related. Education, a social endeavor, is the way society responds to the capacity of its members to learn. The Canadian university must create its own community not identified by a single place, the student's age, or the instructional process. It must cease to evaluate conventional students for society. The university should focus on where, how, why, and what learning is taking place. (CSS)

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ON THE UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY SYMBIOSIS

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ON THE UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY SYMBIOSIS

The Center for Continuing Education
The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada, 1971

This Report was prepared by Dr. Alan M. Thomas
Executive Assistant to the Hon. Robert Stanbury,
Member of Parliament

PREFACE

In June of 1970, the Senate and the Board of Governors of the University of British Columbia approved the creation of the Center for Continuing Education. This new organization assumed the staff and functions of the familiar Department of University Extension. To mark the occasion, an inaugural event featuring Dr. Alan M. Thomas as speaker was held on Friday, November 20, 1970 at the Center for Continuing Education. Dr. Thomas's address was considered a most appropriate statement for our Occasional Papers in Continuing Education Series.

The Extension Department was established at U.B.C. in April 1936. Since that time we have experienced a depression, a world war, the frantic post-war years, and the unprecedented growth of technology and urbanization of the 1960s. At the same time, U.B.C. has become a large and comprehensive institution of international stature, and many other public post-secondary institutions offering adult education programs are now part of the community scene. All of these forces have worked to change the nature of U.B.C.'s principal continuing education organization. In many specific ways, the Center for Continuing Education of today is much unlike the Extension Department of thirty, twenty, or even ten years ago. However, its program is still broad and flexible so as to serve the variety of changing community interests.

Some of the current and prominent program needs are professional continuing education; education at advanced levels in the liberal arts and humanities; leadership in selected aspects of the fine arts; and in-depth examinations of significant public and social issues. We believe that the results of the kinds of changes undergone in the past thirty-five years and the nature of the community needs now served are better reflected in the title, Center for Continuing Education, than in the familiar term, Extension Department (though a certain nostalgia for our former name is difficult to overcome).

We have undergone more than a change in name, however. For example, in a couple of months from now our work will be guided and supported by a Council for the Center for Continuing Education. This Council will be comprised of Center professional staff and representatives of Faculties, Center instructors, our students, and members of the community. We are confident that the work of the Council will further integrate this Center with the University, and this University with the community.

It is our view that the second objective just mentioned, that is, the further integration of University and community, is of crucial importance. Probably at no other time have the university and community needed each other's resources and understanding as they do today. Because of this, we were most pleased that Dr. Alan Thomas accepted our request to examine the University-community relationship.

Dr. Thomas is one of Canada's most prominent adult educators. For six years Dr. Thomas had a joint appointment with the College of Education and The Department of University Extension at U.B.C. While on staff he played a major role in establishing this country's first full graduate degree program in adult education, and motivated dozens of individuals and organizations to initiate or expand adult education programs throughout the province.

In 1961 Dr. Thomas left U.B.C. to become the Associate Director, and then Executive Director in 1962, of the Canadian Association for Adult Education. At the national level he demonstrated the drive and leadership that had been his style in this province. Many key national projects, such as The Canadian Commission on Community Colleges, were for a large part created by Dr. Thomas.

Last year Dr. Thomas left the C.A.A.E. to become the Executive Assistant to the Honourable Robert Stanbury, the federal minister in charge of Citizenship and Information Canada.

Throughout Dr. Thomas's professional career he had been called upon to address himself to important educational questions.

His 1961 paper, The Learning Society, provided concepts and directions which have since that time provided the framework for many new policies and other publications.

The following paper, On The University-Community Symbiosis, effectively examines some of the intricate and critical relationships between these two bodies. We are pleased to be able to publish it as the fifth paper in our Occasional Papers in Continuing Education series.

Jack P. Blaney
Acting Director

January 1971

ON THE UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY SYMBIOSIS

I should not waste a moment pointing out to this special audience that the somewhat grand title of this paper is a result of the sort of cooperation I learned long ago to take for granted at U.B.C. Difficulties of communication of a kind not unfamiliar in Canada meant that in some desperation the title was created here, and I was asked to aim at it, not a bad challenge for a guest speaker. What follows is largely a personal exploration of what the title really means--which I hope you may find in some way rewarding. What I was able to do was to find out in the scholar's refuge, the dictionary, what the word "symbiosis" actually means: "the living together in more or less intimate association or even close union of two dissimilar organisms"; "the living together of two dissimilar organisms in any of various mutually beneficial relationships."

The foregoing may not help you much in ascertaining the direction in which I plan to go, since it demands dealing with two formidable variables that are somehow inextricably related to one another, but at least it serves to establish the ground rules. It is now a game that everyone can play.

The occasion does grant some opportunity for reminiscence. I came for the first time to U.B.C. in the fall of 1956 to join the faculty of the newly created College of Education and to take part in the initial traumas that that involved, as well as to work with the group that then made up the Department of University Extension. My circumstances were quite simple and revealing. As a result of two years of selling textbooks to Canadian educators, I had developed an intellectual interest in education. The only way to pursue it, was to do graduate work in the United States, mixed with two years serving the Canadian Association for Adult Education. At that particular time, a period that concluded exceedingly rapidly, there was little or no employment in Canadian universities in the field of education unless you had risen through the ranks and passed the proper apprenticeship in teacher training and classrcom teaching. U.B.C. in 1956 was a

notable exception. The circumstances existing then, compared with the multiplicity of graduate schools existing now, offering employment for many different kinds of theoreticians who in turn prepare more of a sort that may never see the inside of a formal school classroom, are illustrative of a social enterprise of modest dimension that has become the largest "industry" in the society. This enterprise now is preoccupying the attention, one way or another, of a third of the citizens full-time, using up the largest single amount of government expenditure, and occupying a role of singular and impressive if not frightening power by almost every criterion imaginable. All of this is familiar to you, but we should occasionally remind ourselves of the size of the stakes with which we play. We should also brood a little on the obvious fact that if some changes in education still take thirty or more years, a favourite metaphor of the more impatient among us, some obviously occur in very much faster time than that. If we still get some sense of safety from a belief that we will escape accounting for the changes we urge because they cannot possibly occur within most of our lifetimes, we had better look again.

Above all, we should not be surprised that the relationship of university and community should have become once more obscure and troubling in the face of, in fact as a result of, such change in the scale of institutional magnitude. Indeed if we did not find it troubling and worthy of attention, it would mean that the university was unwilling to observe the same intellectual attachment with respect to its own affairs that it has traditionally observed with respect to the affairs of others.

Since the decline in fashion of the word "progress", we have turned increasingly to the use of the more ambiguous term "change" which is often used alternately as both a stick and a carrot. To be truthful, adult education has prospered on just that shift in world view more often as a stick perhaps, but prospered nonetheless. I do not wish to engage in that today, but I do wish to remind you swiftly of some of the other changes that have taken place which bear on this

exploration. The period to which I refer is roughly twenty years, and if I select most of my examples from the area of adult education, it is partly because of an admitted professional bias, and partly because I believe that these changes do bear directly on what we are examining. There are many examples that might be selected; these seem to me to be the prominent ones.

When I first came here it was still necessary to defend publicly the proposition that adults can learn, that, "to make it familiar," old dogs do learn new tricks. No one has to defend that thesis today, despite the persistent reemergence of the instinct school. It is now accepted by most people that learning can take place any time during a lifetime, and we have turned our attention to how, under what circumstances, and at what price. In fact, it has become so accepted that there is some new curiosity being directed to how the notion, that learning was not potentially a lifetime process, became implanted.

None of you need to be reminded of problems of numbers, of the relentless shift from elite to mass education at the post-secondary level. But in adapting conventional responses to those problems of numbers, how many of us have looked beyond to the results. With the first decline nationally of grade one entrances, we are engaged in delivering, beyond the resources of those conventional adaptations, the first groups of individuals who have endured, enjoyed, or if you prefer survived them. The view that the current tragedy is largely a matter of outliving both our institutions and our ideas is about to be further enacted by the measure of demands these large groups make on the existing institutions. Every shred of evidence suggests that they will not be the friendly, diffident, grateful supporters of the past but that they will insist on further services of all kinds as a right.

The last twenty years was also a period in which we discovered that two of our most cherished institutions of social justice were failing and in fact seemed to be contributing to injustice and poverty. Welfare seems to create dependence rather than stimulating its opposite, and public education fails in trying to intercede between the child and

the economic circumstances of his or her parents. Adult education, which had been until that time seen as largely remedial, often to the exasperation of its exponents, was revealed to have been a considerable, if not total failure in that particular task.

At the other end of that spectrum, we discovered both in Canada and the United States that if the public sector was slow to acknowledge the need and the promise existing in continuing education, the private sector, out of sheer necessity, was not. By the middle of the fifties, it became apparent that industry, the armed services, areas of government, and other major institutions had created extensive, wealthy, and highly varied systems of teaching and learning that in some instances dwarfed the public sector in scope, results and costs. The equally apparent fact was that these systems with few exceptions reinforced the economic, class and educational privileges of the society, and contributed little to any significant change in those orders.

During the same period the inadequacy of relying on initial formal training and chance experience for professional or occupational competence became increasingly evident. The relationship of the most respected of professions to the community has endured a major shift largely due to the concerns about competence. The physical term "half-life" began to be applied to professional education of the conventional kind, and jokes abounded about being a little more ignorant when we wake up in the morning than when we went to bed the night before--painful reversal of expectation, but based perhaps on an outdated and fallacious theory of competence. However, what is emerging in this area is that not only do adults continue to learn, but they must do so, and that what they learn as adults is of the utmost significance. This latter point has been slower of acceptance than almost any other. What is also brought to the fore in this situation is of the greatest consequence for universities since it focuses cruelly on the matter of evaluation. How and by whom is the doctor, lawyer, or engineer to be told that he has become incompetent and cannot be permitted to continue to practice. We have always had the

greatest of difficulty with men judging other men and in this case our conventional institutional responses do not serve us well.

During the period under review, we heard a great deal about education as an investment rather than as an overhead charge to national and local resources. The inference being that the legitimate question to ask was not, is the educational enterprise too big, but rather is it big enough? It was a natural fancy for the period, since it was clear that the country was underinvested even in the most conventional sense. The "western front" appearance of nearly every university and school campus contributed to the "boom" psychology. The attitude was conveyed forcefully to developing countries who believed us, and in comparative terms even outdid us in their hurry to educate their people to economic take-off. We now know how deceptive and simplistic a view this was and is. Though the developing countries (that splendid euphemism for any country without all of its young committed to formal schooling for a minimum of ten years) began to discover the error first, we have discovered too that doing all the same old things, but doing them harder, and on a larger scale, is not a very valuable response to changing circumstances. What does matter is the sort of education provided, and how clearly it is related to intelligible and acceptable goals. If the muttering about costs and the hard noses beginning to obtrude dismay us, it is our own fault for being stubbornly uncritical about our own affairs. We might also acknowledge that many of those hard noses are graduates of our own system.

Finally, most recently in this period, Ivan Illich, the man from Cuernavaca has been pointing out to us in international terms that we have used our educational systems for all sorts of purposes other than educating, and have tried to impose, with the best will in the world, these mixtures of functions somewhat uncritically on other countries where other functions were more important. For example, he has pointed out that one clear function of the elementary school system in our highly industrialized and urbanized society is one of custody. We simply do not have any other place where adults can look

after the children. But what he also argues is that when you carry out this function in expensive buildings, staffed by highly trained and highly paid teachers, it is a very expensive system of custody indeed. Is there some other, less expensive way, to perform the custodial functions? There probably is in less wealthy societies. But what is more important is that there probably is in this society, too. I would argue that a great deal of the legitimate criticism of the students of the universities in Canada rests on the conflict between custody and education, and in general on the failure to distinguish between the purposes of the university and its function.

We also, slowly, learned something about evil in this innocent if struggling world of learning. Many of us thought that if only enough people understood that learning was consistent with life, a new age would flower. What we have found instead is that there are many active resistances to learning, both individual and institutional. Perhaps it is merely aging, perhaps maturity both individual and social, but it is now quite clear that not all the interests of the society want people to learn things they wish to learn. The battle is of a new and different order, and help is needed.

What do all these factors, plus an equal number that any one of you might have chosen with equal justification, add up to? For me, all of these events and developments have helped to clarify a distinction that we should now bring to bear on all of our processes. What is being thrown into perspective is the distinction between learning and education, and how the two are related to each other in any society, but particularly in this one. Learning is not anything that anyone does or has accomplished, it is what human beings do better than any other order of life we know about. It is an activity that can be engaged in under a great variety of circumstances at almost any stage of life. Education on the other hand is not an individual endeavour but a social one. It is the way a society responds to the capacity to learn which exists in its members. Different societies have responded in different ways. Because the institutional response bulks so large in our vision, there is among

the professional managers of that institution a slight but identifiable tendency to conclude that they cause learning. It is a dangerous fallacy because not only is it arrogant, but also it blinds the managers and the institution to the reality and the importance of learning that occurs outside all of the formal systems, learning which can and has to, to a significant degree, flower into open and sometimes violent opposition. The relationship between the general learning that goes on in society, particularly in a society experiencing rapid change, and the institutionalized learning is intricate, obscure and fascinating, but it is also explosive and of the utmost significance. Another way of saying that is simply to point out that we have not given much thought to what precisely happens to learning when it is institutionalized; what does seem apparent is that it is no simple reinforcement of the virtue involved. Whether the university, of all the world institutions that have risen to preeminent power in the affairs of nations, can remain detached and critical of its own affairs in relation to its various communities, is what those of us who live outside the immediate precincts of university life are most concerned about.

The late fifties was a good time to come to U.B.C. It was a good time in universities, a good time in adult education, and a good time with respect to the relationship between them. It was the end of an era when the universities, particularly the western ones, had been the acknowledged leaders of adult education in Canada, and when the community that supported the university understood that its contribution was not only through the perfectioning of the young, but also through contributions to general knowledge and through the application of their resources to community problems as the community defined them. But it could not last. Too many influences were on hand to destroy that simple relationship. Increasingly the universities separated themselves from general leadership, became preoccupied with internal problems and lost the central position they had had. In adult education, Canadian universities found more in common among themselves, and with universities of the world, than they

did with more general Canadian circumstances. They became one specialized educational institution among an increasing variety of others. (One example of that is that the misleading term "post-secondary" was never applied to universities by themselves or by others, until they allowed themselves to become particular examples within a general development that they had lost command of). Curiously enough, it seems to me that the universities and their supporters simply lost interest in learning and became entirely preoccupied with specific institutional tasks. I do not think we should allow ourselves to be bothered much longer by the classic problem of the conflict between research and teaching. Research is a disciplined way of learning and is subject to an infinite number of variations in style, locus, expense, and content. If we would acknowledge that the world changes, however slightly, whenever someone learns something that he did not know before, then we could acknowledge that learning is what we are concerned about whether it is done in laboratory or classroom, library or public meeting.

We must try to restore the preeminence of the university, or we must find another institution that will embody for us the preeminence of learning. One practical theory is that this is done by establishing counter-institutions. The British, for example, will open in January the "Open University". It is a university without entrance requirements, utilizing tutors, regional learning groups, radio, television, and correspondence. Already twenty-five thousand students have registered for the first year. What is quite clear is that the complete reorganizing of the methods and content of teaching, embodied in the "Open University", will have an explosive effect on the whole of higher education in Britain. In part, the learning already accomplished by the teams of instructors, producers, writers and illustrators is being communicated throughout the education field in Britain. In Canada there have been some similar attempts; the much maligned Rochdale with all of its obvious faults and difficulties is one of them. But the real question is whether the universities in

Canada can reform themselves.

It is perfectly evident that there is no one geographical or social and educational community with which the university can or should safely identify. The university must create its own community, a community that will change steadily with all the pain and discomfort that that implies. Another way of saying this is to argue that the university must itself be a community and that that community cannot be identified by a single place, or the age of the students, or the nature of the instructional process. It may of course limit itself in size. All universities do that anyway, though on bases that are increasingly more difficult to defend. What it must cease to do is to provide evaluation of certain individuals, namely conventional students, for the society at large. Increasingly, other institutions are doing their own evaluation anyway. Once they engage in education themselves, they have to engage in evaluation. If they wish to know what experience at a particular university really means for their purposes, it is up to them to find out. With the exclusion of the formal evaluation, the university could become what it should--a community of learning, with its attention faced both functionally and theoretically on the most significant issue in society: where, how, why and what learning is taking place. It would mean admitting, in fact choosing and cherishing, individuals of any age who indicated their willingness to engage in mutual exploration rather than their wish to be taught. What would develop as a definition of this community would be a common style of life shared to varying degrees by the participants.

The basic values of the society are changing. For the first time some doubt in the size of the GNP as a measure of our success as a society is being expressed. What is equally significant is that the theory of knowledge and action, on which most of us were raised and educated, is floundering. The idea that one must know as much as is imaginable about a general case before entering into specific action clearly will not stand up in the present world. Without a substitute concept, that action is part of learning about the circumstances in

which action is required, paralysis results. This puts learning at the heart of everyman's entire life, and unless we can develop an institution or a body of men who wish to understand and share this complex relationship, I believe as a society we are finished. No one of us likes to change himself in the face of something or somebody who is apparently not changing. Change is only successful and humane if it is mutual. This has to be the nature of the relationship between the new university and its community.

All this is said in an atmosphere of hope reflected by the opening of this new center. It is also said in Canada in 1970. The sixties has been a tumultuous, terrifying, exhilarating, and tragic decade. One could easily despair if one counted the costs one by one. But for me there is a great deal to be hopeful, actively hopeful, about. Since 1967, it is quite clear that most Canadians have no trouble knowing their identity, whatever difficulty they may have in expressing it. We are now beginning to set the stage for learning together what it means to be Canadian. There are many roots in the old Canada firmly tied to learning of immense variety. With the help of the universities we must restate this tradition again and again so it is as fresh and intoxicating as every new act of learning. There is a chance here in the 1970s for a learning society.